DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 453 CG 009 191

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TITLE The Drinking Practices of Students at the University of Minnesota.
INSTITUTION Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Office for Student Affairs.
PUB DATE Aug 74
NOTE 19p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Alcoholic Beverages; *College Students; Individual Differences; National Norms; Research Projects; *Surveys; *Use Studies

ABSTRACT

A mailed survey was conducted of the drinking practices of students at the University of Minnesota. Responses were received from 402 of the 496 individuals in a random sample of students at the Twin Cities campus. Key findings include: (1) the majority of students, 56 percent of the men and 61 percent of the women, were classed as moderate drinkers; (2) among the male respondents, 24 percent were judged to be heavy drinkers and 10 percent were estimated to be potential problem drinkers; (3) among female respondents 10 percent were classed as heavy drinkers, while 5 percent were estimated to be potential problem drinkers; and (4) for both sexes the proportions of heavy drinkers and estimated potential problem drinkers did not differ from 1964 national norms. (Author)

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THE DRINKING PRACTICES OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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In December of 1971 A Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare declared the abuse of beverage alcohol to be the Nation's No. 1 drug problem. Among the indices which prompted this conclusion are the following:

> One in 10 Americans is estimated to be a problem drinker, and one in 20 is probably addicted to alcohol.
> One in 5 has a family member who drinks too much.
>
> Alcohol is involved in 40% of admissions to mental hospitals and a third of all arrests in the nation. In half of the murders in the U.S., either the killer or the victim has been drinking.
>
> Alcohol is involved in half the traffic fatalities in the U.S. as well as half the home accidents resulting in serious injury.
>
> The suicide rate for alcoholics is 58 times the rate for non-alcoholics.
> The average life span for alcoholics is twelve years shorter than the average life span of non-alcoholics.
> Cirrhosis of the liver, predominantly attributable to alcohol abuse, is the Nation's seventh leading cause of death.

The social impact of alcohol abuse was further underscored by the second Special Report on Alcohol and Health, issued July 10, 1974. Contained in this document was the estimate that alcohol abuse costs the economy of the United States $25 billion annually, including $9.35 billion in lost production, $8.29 billion in health care, $6.4 million in costs related to motor vehicles, and the remainder in welfare, court and administrative costs. Also reported were preliminary medical findings suggesting a link between heavy drinking and cancer of the pharynx, larynx, esophagus, and liver.

It is apparent that alcohol abuse is a substantial public health problem and therefore an appropriate object for educational and treatment programs at the national, state, and local levels. A prerequisite for the development of alcohol-oriented programs is accurate data describing the drinking practices of

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the populations who will be affected by these efforts. Such data can provide an assessment of both the need for new alcohol programs and an evaluation of the impact of existing programs. The primary purposes of the present report are to provide (a) normative data describing the drinking patterns of students at the University of Minnesota and (b) an estimate of the number of problem drinkers among U of M students.

Previous Studies of Student Drinking

The first comprehensive national survey of drinking among college students was conducted by Straus and Bacon (1953). Despite variations in alcohol consumption attributable to sex, age, type of college, family income, religious affiliation, and incidence of drinking by peers and parents, the majority of students could be classed as moderate drinkers. Further surveys from 1953 to 1972 did not substantially alter the picture of collegiate drinking (HEW, 1973). Trends in drinking by college students have generally mirrored the drinking trends in society at large. Just as there has been a gradual, steady increase in the number of drinkers in the general adult population over the last 20 years, so has there been a similar gradual increase in the number of drinkers among college students. The most recent summary of collegiate drinking surveys, covering the period from 1969 to 1972 found a marginal decrease in the amount consumed by college students, in contrast with dramatic increase in the usage of marijuana and hallucinogens (HEW, 1973). At no time during the past 20 years has collegiate alcohol consumption been markedly different from that of the general population.

There are, however, recent indications that changes in collegiate drinking practices might be expected in the near future. Among senior high students surveyed during the period of 1969 to 1972, the incidence of drinking increased by 90% (HEW, 1973). Moreover, preliminary findings from the most recent

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national survey of junior and senior high drinking revealed that 63% of seventh grade boys and 54% of seventh grade girls had had a drink. For twelfth graders the numbers of drinkers were 93% for boys and 87% for girls (HEW, 1974). These survey results tend to corroborate the observation by a number of youth workers that young people's attitudes towards various drugs are currently changing. Dr. Morris Chafetz, Director of the Government's National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, has observed that "The switch is on. Youths are moving from a wide range of other drugs to the most devastating drug--the one most widely misused of all--alcohol" (Time, 1974). If there is indeed a stable trend toward increased alcohol consumption by today's senior high students, we might expect a similar trend in collegiate drinking as these youths enroll in college.

METHOD

Sample and Survey Questionnaire

The survey was conducted through a questionnaire mailed to a random sample of 496 students enrolled at the Twin Cities Campus of the University of Minnesota during Winter Quarter, 1974. Responses were received from 402 students. Four other students returned blank questionnaires, and seventeen students were not reached because they had moved and had left no forwarding addresses. Adjusting for these seventeen students, the response rate was 81%.

Sixty percent of the respondents were males and 40% were females. Thirteen percent were freshmen, 16% were sophomores, 20% were juniors, 24% were seniors, and 27% were adult special or graduate students. Thirty percent of the sample were married.

Questionnaire items were pretested on 14 students at Macalester College on January 24, 1974. Members of the full random sample for this study were mailed a pre-letter which introduced the study and requested their participation. The questionnaire, accompanied by a cover letter, was mailed to the members of the sample on February 19. Non-respondents were mailed a first follow-up letter on

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March 6 and a second follow-up letter with a second copy of the questionnaire on March 19.

Measure of Alcohol Consumption

The basic measure of alcohol consumption employed in this study was the Quantity-Frequency (Q-F) Index developed by Straus and Bacon (1953) and adapted by Maxwell (1958), Mulford and Miller (1963), and Mulford (1964). The Q-F Index is based on the respondent's report of the number of drinks (converted to ounces of absolute alcohol) which he ordinarily consumes at a sitting, combined with the reported frequency of sitting. Questions about frequency and modal amount are asked separately for beer, wine, and hard liquor. Responses are summed across beverages in order to arrive at a classification of individuals as abstainers, light, moderate, or heavy drinkers. Definitions of each of the categories are as follows:

(a) Abstainer - Drinks no alcoholic beverages with frequency once a month or more.

(b) Light Drinker - Drinks some alcoholic beverage at most twice a month; no upper bound on amount consumed at this infrequent rate.

(c) Moderate Drinker - Drinks some alcoholic beverage at least twice a month but on the average does not consume more than (1) two cans of beer, (2) two glasses of wine, or (3) two mixed drinks, at any one sitting.

(d) Heavy Drinker - Drinks some alcoholic beverage more than twice a month and on the average consumes at least (1) three cans of beer, (2) three glasses of wine, or (3) three mixed drinks at any one sitting.

Validity data for the Q-F Index are sparse. Mulford and Miller (1963) found that heavy drinkers (as classified by the Q-F Index) were found in greater proportion than light or moderate drinkers to report ownership of individual liquor permits, to attend parties where liquor is served, to keep liquor on hand, to report problems with drinking, and to feel that they drink too much. Kirsch et al (1967) found that the quantity-frequency responses of 81 individuals registered

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at alcoholism clinic, (but not yet receiving treatment) indicated much heavier drinking than did the responses of a group of matched controls. The latter data must be qualified by the possibility that individuals who admitted they need treatment have little reason to deliberately misrepresent their actual drinking behavior. If it is assumed that the admission of heavy drinking is socially undesirable for most individuals, then it is possible that self-reports of quantity and frequency tend to underestimate actual consumption.

Adequate reliability data for the Q-F Index are also unavailable. The reliability of the measure is necessarily limited in that it depends on individuals' judgments of their typical drinking behavior. The accuracy of these judgments is unknown. An alternative to judgments of typical behavior might be to have respondents keep diaries of actual drinking behavior. The diary method, however, must cope with the problem of bias in the sampling of times when the diary is kept.

In addition to uncertain validity and reliability, the Q-F Index has the drawback of not considering variability in drinking patterns. There may be important differences between "massed" and "spaced" drinking. One individual might take two drinks a day, while another takes 14 drinks once a week, and yet another 7 drinks twice a day. All three would be classed as heavy drinkers according to Q-F Index, with no distinctions made among them. Differences between the "binge" drinker and the "frequent-moderate" drinker may be sufficient to warrant separate classification.

A variant of the Q-F Index, which does consider variability has been developed by the Social Research Group of George Washington University in its longitudinal American Drinking Practices study (Cahalan et al, 1969; Cahalan, 1970). This variant, the Volume-Variability Index, considers both the modal amount of alcohol most frequently consumed, and the maximum amount occasionally consumed. The index is thus able to distinguish "massed" and "spaced" drinking. An attempt was made in the present study to utilize questions which would permit the computation of the Volume-Variability Index. However pretest results indicated that

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the necessary questions were too lengthy and complex to be answerable outside the context of a personal interview.

Despite its limitations, the Quantity-Frequency Index appears to be the best measure of alcohol consumption currently available for use in mailed surveys. Mulford and Miller (1963) recommend that it be considered only as a "convenient tool adequate for the task of ranking individuals as light, moderate, or heavy drinkers" (page 27). The present study confines its use of the Q-F Index to this purpose of achieving global ranking of drinking types.

Potential Problem Drinking

As an estimate of potential problem drinking, the Heavy Escape Index, developed by Cahalan et al (1969) was employed. To be classed as a heavy escape drinker, an individual must meet both of the following criteria: (a) be defined as a heavy drinker on the Quantity Frequency Index, (b) endorse as "very" or "fairly important" at least two of the following five reasons for drinking:

1. I drink because it helps me relax.
2. I drink when I want to forget something.
3. A drink helps me forget my worries.
4. A drink helps cheer me up when I'm in a bad mood.
5. I drink because I need it when tense.

The rationale for the Heavy Escape Index is based on the assumption that certain reasons for drinking are more indicative of pathology than other reasons (Mulford & Miller, 1964; Straus & Bacon, 1953; Riley et al, 1948). Drinking in order to alleviate feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness is regarded as more indicative of psychological dependence and hence potential problems than is drinking because of taste or a desire to be sociable. It is presumed that the individual who both drinks heavily and drinks in order to escape negative emotions risks the possibility of losing control over his consumption of alcohol.

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Estimates of potential problem drinking based on the Heavy-Escape Index should be considered highly tentative, because no data are available on the predictive validity of the measure. Some data supporting the concurrent validity of the index were obtained by Cahalan et al (1969) through comparisons of heavy-escape drinkers with heavy drinkers who did not meet the escape criterion. Heavy-Escape drinkers, as opposed to heavy, non-escape drinkers, reported more worry about drinking, more effects of drinking, more dissatisfaction with their life goals, their occupations and their health, more use of activities to relieve anxiety and depression, and attained higher scores on measures of neurotic tendencies and alientation. These findings are basically congruent with studies of the personality traits of problem drinkers by Park (1962) and Williams (1965). Further corroboration of the rationale for the Heavy Escape measure was provided by Cahalan (1969) in an extensive, nationwide study of problem drinking. Individuals who drank heavily and showed escape tendencies were more likely than other individuals to have a wide range of problems associated with alcohol, including marital, health and financial problems, belligerence, symtomatic drinking (e.g. blackouts and sneaking drinks) and problems with friends and neighbors. Again, however, it should be stressed that the predictive utility of the Heavy Escape Index is assumed and has not been demonstrated.

Self and Peer Attitudes toward Drinking

In addition to describing typical and potentially problematic drinking behavior, survey items were directed toward two other questions of special relevance to youthful alcohol usage. (1) To what extent is student drinking a function of social facilitation? Do students feel peer pressure to drink? (2) How concerned are students about their drinking behavior and its effects? Do heavy drinkers perceive themselves as drinking more than other students?

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Items relevant to these issues were adapted from Straus & Bacon (1953) and Cahalan et al (1969).

RESULTS *

Frequency of Drinking

Eighty-seven percent of the male respondents and 82% of the female respondents indicated that they drink alcoholic beverages at least once a month. Tables 1 and 2 show the self-estimated frequency with which beer, wine, and hard liquor are consumed by those men and women who reported drinking once a month or more.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 here

For both males and females the most frequently consumed beverage is beer, with 63% of the men and 35% of the women reporting that they drink beer once a week or more. In contrast, wine is consumed once a week or more by 23% of the men and 27% of the women, and hard liquor is consumed at least weekly by 28% of the males and 23% of the females. Overall, the male respondents reported drinking more often than did the female respondents, with the majority of this difference attributable to differential beer consumption. The women's alcohol consumption is more evenly distributed across beverage classes than is the men's.

Quantities Consumed

Tables 3 and 4 present the average quantities of beer, wine, and hard liquor consumed at a sitting by men and women who drink at least once a month.

Insert Tables 3 and 4 here

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* Percentages in the text are rounded off to the nearest whole number.

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For both sexes and for all three beverage classes, the majority of respondents reported consuming an average of two servings or less each time they drink. When drinking beer and hard liquor, the men tend to have more servings: Fifty-nine percent of the men versus 17% of the women average three or more glasses of beer per sitting; 42% of the men versus 27% of the women average three or more servings of hard liquor per sitting; when drinking wine, equal proportions of men and women (29%) average three or more servings at a sitting.

Quantity-Frequency

Figure 1 shows the percentages of all male and female respondents, classed as abstainers, light, moderate, and heavy drinkers according to the Quantity-Frequency Index.

Insert Figure 1 here

The majority of respondents (56% of the males and 61% of the females) fall into the moderate drinking category. More males than females (24% vs 10%) are heavy drinkers, while more females than males (29% vs 20%) are light drinkers or abstainers.

Although Cahalan et al (1969) utilized a variant of the Quantity-Frequency Index in their national American Drinking Practices Survey, comparisons with their data are useful. Among a national sample of individuals ages 21 to 24 surveyed in 1964-65, 23% of the men and 10% of the women were found to be heavy drinkers, percentages virtually identical to those found in the present survey ten years later. With respect to the numbers abstaining, Cahalan et al (1969) found that 17% of the men and 32% of the women ages 21 to 24 abstained, as opposed to our finding of 13% male and 17% female abstainers. An increase

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in the number of female drinkers appears to be the major difference between the present findings and those of ten years ago.

Potential Problem Drinking

To qualify as a potential problem drinker, an individual had to meet the dual criteria of the Heavy Escape index, indicating both heavy drinking and a tendency to drink in order to escape nervousness, worry, or anxiety. Among the male respondents 10% were identified as Heavy Escape drinkers, while 5% of the women qualified. These figures compare quite closely with the finding of Cahalan et al (1969) that 13% of the men and 5% of the women in a national sample were Heavy Escape drinkers.

Self Evaluation of Drinking

Table 5 presents responses to the question "How much do you worry about your drinking?" for each sex and Quantity-Frequency category.

Insert Table 5 here

The trend for both sexes is essentially similar, with moderate and heavy drinkers worrying more about their drinking than abstainers or light drinkers. The one exception to this trend is the 7% of male light drinkers who reported worrying "a lot" about their drinking. Overall, respondents exhibited little worry about their drinking. Even among heavy drinkers, 63% of the males and 67% of the females reported that they were not at all worried about their drinking.

Table 6 presents repondents' estimates of how much they drink in comparison with average college students of the same sex.

Insert Table 6 here

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In general respondents tended to underestimate how much they drink in comparison with their peers. Fifty-four percent of the male and 63% of the female moderate drinkers saw themselves as drinking somewhat or much less than their peers, when the Quantity-Frequency Index indicates that they actually drink about as much as others. The tendency to misperceive drinking norms was most pronounced for the heavy drinkers. Although the Quantity-Frequency Index indicates that these individuals drink more than others, only 20% of the males and 40% of the females saw themselves as drinking more than the average. Twenty-six percent of the male and 13% of the female heavy drinkers actually felt that they drink less than most other students.

Peer pressure

Table 7 presents responses to the question, "Do your college friends ever encourage you to have a drink with them when you would rather not drink?"

Insert Table 7 here

For both sexes and for all Quantity-Frequency types the majority of respondents reported that they felt such pressure either "never" or "once in a while." Occasional or frequent instances of peer pressure were reported most often by light drinkers (23% of the male and 38% of the female light drinkers).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are quite consistent with the trend of earlier surveys to find few differences between the drinking practices of college students and those of other segments of American society. The proportions of heavy drinkers among respondents of both sexes were virtually identical to the proportions of heavy drinkers among 21 to 24 year olds across the Nation ten years ago. Similarly, the proportions of potential problem

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drinkers were very close to the national norms. While the number of abstainers is lower than ten years ago, especially among women, a similar increase in the number of drinkers is evident in the entire population. If there is an upsurge in youthful drinking, it would appear that the trend has yet to reach the University of Minnesota. It would be useful to repeat this study in the future to see whether the expected increase in drinking will materialize.

The lack of a drinking "epidemic" does not necessarily mean that student drinking should not be a matter of concern to the University community. If we were to make the highly tentative assumption that the proportion of problem drinkers in our sample is representative of the entire student body, then we would estimate that there are about 3200 potential problem drinkers among students attending the Twin Cities Campus. The number of such individuals might be large enough to justify special attention. Alcohol education is one area which could be given consideration. Our findings that heavy drinkers misperceive how much they drink in comparison with other students and also feel little concern about their drinking suggest that students might need to gain more self-understanding in regard to their drinking behavior. A clear knowledge of one's own drinking practices is essential both to the recognition of possible problems and the rational control of alcohol usage.

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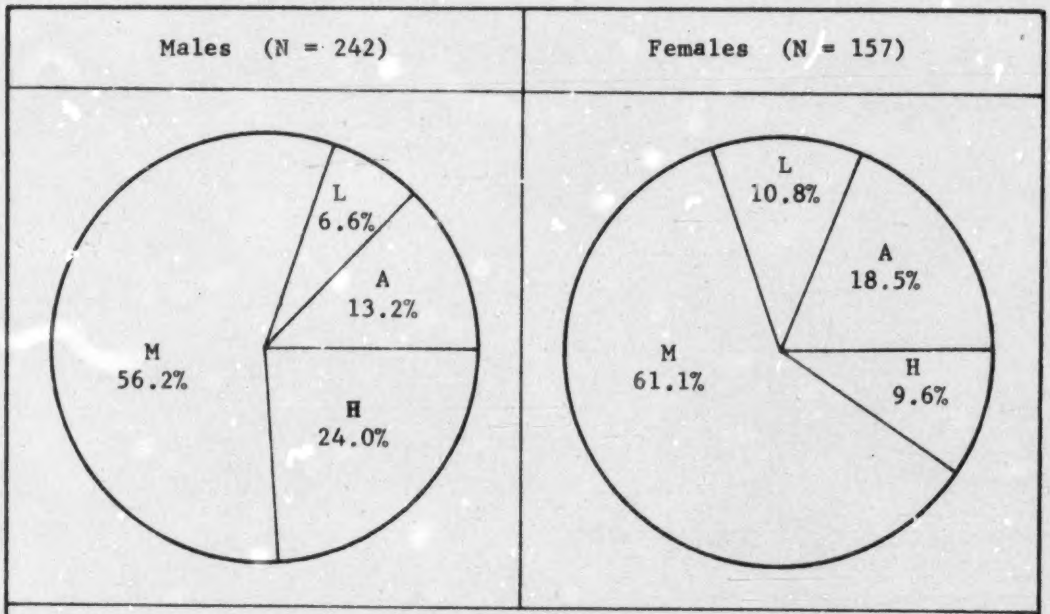

Category Definitions

Abstainer (A): Drinks no alcoholic beverages with frequency once a month or more.

Light Drinker (L): Drinks some alcoholic beverage at most twice a month; no upper bound on amount consumed at this infrequent rate.

Moderate Drinker (M): Drinks some alcoholic beverage at least twice a month but on the average does not consume more than (1) two cans of beer, (2) two glasses of wine, or (3) two mixed drinks, at any one sitting.

Heavy Drinker (H): Drinks some alcoholic beverage more than twice a month and on the average consumes at least (1) three cans of beer, (2) three glasses of wine, or (3) three mixed drinks at any one sitting.

Figure 1. Quantity-Frequency Index by Sex

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TABLE 1

FREQUENCIES OF DRINKING FOR MALES

Beverage	Frequency (Distribution in Percentages)						N
	Every Day	Nearly Every Day	Three or Four Times a Week	Once or Twice a Week	Two or Three Times a Month	About Once a Month	
Beer	2.6	7.3	16.1	37.3	25.9	10.9	193
Wine	0.5	1.6	2.6	18.5	36.0	40.7	189
Hard Liquor	0.0	1.1	4.7	21.6	34.2	38.4	190

TABLE 2

FREQUENCIES OF DRINKING FOR FEMALES

Beverage	Frequency (Distribution in Percentages)						N
	Every Day	Nearly Every Day	Three or Four Times a Week	Once or Twice a Week	Two or Three Times a Month	About Once a Month	
Beer	0.0	1.0	4.0	30.0	27.0	38.0	100
Wine	0.9	3.5	3.5	19.3	36.0	36.8	114
Hard Liquor	0.0	0.0	3.4	19.5	40.7	36.4	118

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TABLE 3

AVERAGE QUANTITIES CONSUMED

AT A SITTING FOR MALES

Beverage	No. of Servings* (Distribution in Percentages)					N
	7 or more	5-6	3-4	1-2	None	
Beer	3.5	13.4	32.8	46.3	4.0	201
Wine	1.5	6.1	22.2	61.1	9.1	198
Hard Liquor	2.0	8.5	31.0	50.0	8.5	200

TABLE 4

AVERAGE QUANTITIES CONSUMED

AT A SITTING FOR FEMALES

Beverage	No. of Servings* (Distribution in Percentages)					N
	7 or more	5-6	3-4	1-2	None	
Beer	0.8	2.5	13.4	58.0	25.2	119
Wine	0.8	4.9	23.8	59.8	10.7	122
Hard Liquor	1.6	4.8	21.0	66.1	6.5	124

*One serving:

Beer = 12 oz. (one bottle or can)

Wine = approx. 5 oz.

Hard Liquor = 1½ oz. (jigger) of liquor

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TABLE 5

WORRY ABOUT DRINKING BY QUANTITY - FREQUENCY INDEX

Worry	Quality - Frequency Index (Percentage Distribution)							
	Abstainer		Light		Moderate		Heavy	
	Male (N=32)	Female (N=29)	Male (N=14)	Female (N=16)	Male (N=136)	Female (N=96)	Male (N=57)	Female (N=15)
A lot	0.0	0.0	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.5	6.7
Some	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.1	4.2	12.3	13.3
A Little	0.0	3.4	0.0	0.0	20.6	11.5	21.1	13.3
Not At All	100.0	96.6	92.8	100.0	74.3	84.4	63.2	66.7

TABLE 6

PERCEIVED AMOUNT OF DRINKING

Drinking Compared With Peers	Quantity - Frequency Index (Percentage Distribution)							
	Abstainer		Light		Moderate		Heavy	
	Male (N=30)	Female (N=27)	Male (N=15)	Female (N=17)	Male (N=135)	Female (N=94)	Male (N=58)	Female (N=15)
Much More	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.4	13.3
Somewhat More	0.0	0.0	6.7	0.0	6.7	5.3	17.2	26.7
About the Same	0.0	7.4	0.0	0.0	39.3	31.9	53.4	46.7
Somewhat Less	0.0	14.8	60.0	35.3	40.0	44.7	22.4	13.3
Much Less	100.0	77.8	33.3	64.7	14.1	18.1	3.4	0.0

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TABLE 7

PEER PRESSURE TO DRINK BY QUANTITY - FREQUENCY INDEX

Peer Pressure	Quantity - Frequency Index (Percentage Distribution)							
	Abstainer		Light		Moderate		Heavy	
	Male (N=31)	Female (N=29)	Male (N=13)	Female (N=16)	Male (N=136)	Female (N=96)	Male (N=58)	Female (N=15)
Frequently	3.2	6.9	7.7	0.0	3.7	0.0	3.4	6.7
Occasionally	16.1	13.8	15.4	37.5	12.5	13.5	15.5	6.7
Once in a While	38.7	41.4	30.8	31.3	41.9	32.3	37.9	33.3
Never	35.5	31.0	46.2	31.3	41.9	53.1	43.1	46.7
No Friends Who Drink	6.5	6.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	6.7